

# WORKERS SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT



## HOW LENIN LED TO STALIN AND MORE



PRINCIPLES, PROPOSITIONS &  
DISCUSSIONS  
FOR LAND & FREEDOM

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD TO THE  
'ANARCHIVE'  
**"Anarchy is Order!"**

*'I must Create a System or be enslav'd by  
another Man's.  
I will not Reason & Compare: my business  
is to Create'  
(William Blake)*

During the 19th century, anarchism has developed as a result of a social current which aims for freedom and happiness. A number of factors since World War I have made this movement, and its ideas, disappear little by little under the dust of history.

After the classical anarchism – of which the Spanish Revolution was one of the last representatives—a 'new' kind of resistance was founded in the sixties which claimed to be based (at least partly) on this anarchism. However this resistance is often limited to a few (and even then partly misunderstood) slogans such as 'Anarchy is order', 'Property is theft',...

Information about anarchism is often hard to come by, monopolised and intellectual; and therefore visibly disappearing. The 'anarchival' or 'anarchist archive' Anarchy is Order (in short **A.O**) is an attempt to make the '**principles, propositions and discussions**' of this tradition available again for anyone it concerns. We believe that these texts are part of our own heritage. They don't belong to publishers, institutes or specialists.

These texts thus have to be available for all anarchists and other people interested. That is one of the conditions to give anarchism a new impulse, to let the 'new

anarchism' outgrow the slogans. This is what makes this project relevant for us: we must find our roots to be able to renew ourselves. We have to learn from the mistakes of our socialist past. History has shown that a large number of the anarchist ideas remain standing, even during the most recent social-economic developments.

**'Anarchy Is Order' does not make profits, everything is spread at the price of printing- and papercosts. This of course creates some limitations for these archives.**

**Everyone is invited to spread along the information we give . This can be done by copying our leaflets, printing from the CD that is available or copying it, e-mailing the texts ,...Become your own anarchiv!!!**

(Be aware though of copyright restrictions. We also want to make sure that the anarchist or non-commercial printers, publishers and authors are not being harmed. Our priority on the other hand remains to spread the ideas, not the ownership of them.)

The anarchiv offers these texts hoping that values like **freedom, solidarity and direct action** get a new meaning and will be lived again; so that the struggle continues against the

*'demons of flesh and blood, that sway scepters down  
here;  
and the dirty microbes that send us dark diseases and  
wish to  
squash us like horseflies;  
and the will-'o-the-wisp of the saddest ignorance'.  
(L-P. Boon)*

The rest depends as much on you as it depends on us.  
Don't mourn, Organise!

Comments, questions, criticism, cooperation can be send  
to

[A.O@advalvas.be](mailto:A.O@advalvas.be)

A complete list and updates are available on this  
address, new texts are always

**welcome!!**

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## **A FRESH LOOK AT LENIN**

THE COLLAPSE of the regimes in Eastern Europe has thrown up all sorts of questions about socialism. So let's go back to the beginning. The Russian revolution of 1917 ([http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/russia\\_wsm.html](http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/russia_wsm.html)) was, initially, a shot in the arm for socialists everywhere. It was possible, it existed and now it only remained to imitate it everywhere else.

But as time passed it became obvious that something had gone terribly wrong. Instead of being the inspiring picture of our future, Russia had turned into a squalid class-ridden dictatorship.

As purge followed purge and the new rulers allocated themselves the best of everything, the socialist movement in the West floundered as it sought explanations for what had gone wrong.

### **FLAT EARTH SOCIETY**

There were those who found the idea of an existing socialist society so attractive that they refused to believe all the evidence to the contrary. These were the people who wrote glowing articles about the mechanisation of agriculture while old Bolsheviks were being tortured in the cellars of Stalin's secret police.

With the upheavals in Eastern Europe most of these Stalinists with rose-tinted spectacles have had to start facing reality, albeit begrudgingly. Those who still refuse to do so are no different in attitude or degree of stupidity from

the Flat Earth Society or the fanatics of the Bermuda Triangle.

Among those socialists who accept that something went badly wrong (and not just in the last year or two!), the debate continues. Why should a revolution led by dedicated followers of Lenin have produced an oppressive regime where workers had no rights and bureaucrats had all the power and privileges.

### TROTSKY

Two explanations seem the most worthy of consideration. The first, put forward by Trotsky and his subsequent followers, comes down to this: no amount of dedication on behalf of the communists could offset the dreadful weight of the material difficulties.

In such a backward country, beset by civil war on all sides, with much of its working class destroyed in battle, degeneration was avoidable. Perhaps if Lenin had lived, or if Trotsky had replaced him as the no.1 leader, things might have been different - but it was not to be.

### LENIN ...AND FATE

"Lenin certainly did not call for a dictatorship of the party over the proletariat, even less for that of a bureaucratised party over a decimated proletariat. But fate - the desperate condition of a backward country besieged by world capitalism - led to precisely this".

Tony Cliff, Lenin, Vol.3, page 111.

"The proletariat of a backward country was fated to accomplish the first socialist revolution. For this historic privilege it must, according to all the evidences, pay with a

second supplementary revolution against bureaucratic absolutism"

Trotsky, The Age of Permanent Revolution: A Trotsky Anthology, page 278.

Thus according to the Trotskyists, it was hard material factors such as backwardness and the isolation of the young Bolshevik state which resulted in the tragic degeneration of the revolution. And don't forget "fate" - a most unusual term for 'scientific socialists' to use.

## ANARCHISTS

An alternative explanation of events in Russia is provided by the anarchists, who see the prime cause of the revolution's failure in the ideas of the Bolsheviks. The anarchist argument has the great advantage that it was not constructed to explain events after they took place but was formulated before and during the revolution.

Anarchists had always gone in for dire predictions of what would happen if revolutionaries attempted to take over the state instead of smashing it at the first opportunity. They understood two things: firstly, either the working class has direct and absolute control or some other class does; secondly, the state only serves the needs of a minority class which seeks to rule over the majority. No party could claim the right to make decisions for the working class, this would be the start of their progress towards becoming a new ruling class.

## TOLD YOU SO!!!

Forty five years before 1917, Mikhail Bakunin, the leading anarchist in the International Working Mens' Association,



warned of just such a prospect. He saw that the authoritarians would interpret the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' to mean their own dictatorship which

"would be the rule of scientific intellect, the most autocratic, the most despotic, the most arrogant and the most contemptuous of all regimes. They will be a new class, a new hierarchy of sham savants, and the world will be divided into a dominant minority in the name of science, and an immense ignorant majority"

Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists*, page 93.

While a small minority of anarchists thought it would be possible to co-operate with the Bolsheviks, the majority were positive that, though the Bolsheviks did not set out to create a new class system, this was precisely what they were achieving. The anarchist Sergven recorded in 1918 that

"The proletariat is being gradually enserfed by the state. The people are being transformed into servants over whom there has arisen a new class of administrators - a new class born mainly from the womb of the so-called intelligentsia. Isn't this merely a new class system looming on the revolutionary horizon".

Paul Avrich, *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, page 123

## CENTRALISED POWER

And he could point a finger at the cause of this enserfment.

"We do not mean to say ...that the Bolshevik party set out to create a new class system But we do say that even the best intentions and aspirations must inevitably be smashed

against the evils inherent in any system of centralised power"  
Ibid page 124.

In other words, unless centralised state power is immediately destroyed, the revolution is doomed to create a new ruling class. Either the masses have real power or the state does. For the anarchists it was a case of either a federation of workers' councils where the power came from below or the authority of the party/state giving orders to the masses. The two could not co-exist.

### "SCIENTIFIC" SOCIALISTS

Thus the two most plausible explanations for the failure of the revolution are opposed to each other. On the one hand we have the Trotskyists who, being 'scientific socialists' see the cause of the failure in 'material circumstances' such as Russian backwardness, civil war and the failure of the revolution to spread across Europe. The Bolsheviks, had, it appears, understood Marxism and applied it correctly and yet were faced with events beyond their control that conspired to defeat them. Consequently the theory and party structure put forward by Lenin, remain, according to this school of thought, adequate today.

The Anarchists would agree that a revolution can't survive for too long if isolated in the middle of a sea of capitalism. They don't, however, believe that this explains everything that happened. What you end up with will be related to what you seek and how you fight for it. They argue that it was precisely the theory and party structures of Bolshevism that led to the bureaucratisation and death of the genuine liberatory revolution.

## BEING REALISTIC

Neither argument is entirely satisfying. It is undoubtably true that the Bolsheviks had to face very difficult conditions when they assumed power. But according to their own mentor this will always be the case.

"...those who believe that socialism will be built at a time of peace and tranquillity are profoundly mistaken: it will everywhere be built at a time of disruption, at a time of famine."

Lenin, Collected Works, Vol.27 page 517.

This makes sense. Revolution, by its very nature, involves some disruption and civil war (though not necessarily famine). If a party organised on Bolshevik lines cannot survive a period of disruption without degenerating into a bureaucratic monolith then clearly such a form of organisation must be avoided at all costs.

## GRUBBY HANDS

Some anarchists tend to oversimplify the problem and see the Bolsheviks as setting out from day one to become an elite of privileged rulers. This is similarly unsatisfying. Are we really to believe that the whole Bolshevik party were only interested in making a revolution for the sole purpose of getting their grubby hands on state power so that they could make themselves into a new ruling class?

The briefest look at what they suffered in the Tsarist prisons, in Siberia, in exile and later in Stalin's purges suggests that such a notion is highly suspect! We must accept that most of them were courageous men and women with high ideals.

## WHAT POLITICS?

Nevertheless there is a great strength to the anarchist case. It points to errors in the theory and practice of Bolshevism itself. It says that no matter how honest their intentions, their politics still lead them to be objectively opposed to the interests of the working class. It turns our attention to the theories of those who led Russia from workers' control to Stalinism.

It is too often taken for granted among socialists that we know what the Bolsheviks stood for. Before we can understand why things went wrong in Russia we need to know what exactly the Bolsheviks proposed to do on coming to power, what kind of structure they put forward, what form they thought the revolution would take, and what kind of society did they set out to create.

## FROM LENIN'S MOUTH

It is particularly interesting to look at the ideas of V.I.Lenin - he was the unquestioned leader of the Bolsheviks and is still regarded as the greatest ever socialist, after Marx, by the vast majority of those who see themselves as revolutionary socialists.

It can be a dangerous practice to pick quotations for use in an article such as this. Who is to say that they are not taken out of context. To allow the reader to make up his/her own mind all sources are provided so that the complete piece can be read if desired. It is felt necessary to use Lenin's own words lest there be an accusation that words are being put in his mouth.

## LENIN'S SOCIALISM

The starting point must be Lenin's conception of 'socialism':

"When a big enterprise assumes gigantic proportions, and, on the basis of an exact computation of mass data, organises according to plan the supply of raw materials to the extent of two-thirds, or three fourths, of all that is necessary for tens of millions of people; when raw materials are transported in a systematic and organised manner to the most suitable places of production, sometimes situated hundreds of thousands of miles from each other; when a single centre directs all the consecutive stages of processing the materials right up to the manufacture of numerous varieties of finished articles; when the products are distributed according to a single plan among tens of millions of customers.

"...then it becomes evident that we have socialisation of production, and not mere 'interlocking'; that private economic and private property relations constitute a shell which no longer fits its contents, a shell which must inevitably decay if its removal is artificially delayed, a shell which may remain in a state of decay for a fairly long period ...but which will inevitably be removed"

Lenin, Collected Works, Vol.22, page 303.

## SOCIALISM?

This is an important passage of Lenin's. What he is describing here is the economic set-up which he thought typical of both advanced monopoly capitalism and socialism. Socialism was, for Lenin, planned capitalism with the private ownership removed.

"Capitalism has created an accounting apparatus in the shape of the banks, syndicates, postal service, consumers' societies, and office employees unions. Without the big banks socialism would be impossible."

The big banks are the "state apparatus" which we need to bring about socialism, and which we take ready made from capitalism; our task is merely to lop off what characteristically mutilates this excellent apparatus, to make it even bigger, even more democratic, even more comprehensive. Quantity will be transformed into quality.

"A single state bank, the biggest of the big, with branches in every rural district, in every factory, will constitute as much as nine-tenths of the socialist apparatus. This will be country-wide book-keeping, country-wide accounting of the production and distribution of goods, this will be, so to speak, something in the nature of the skeleton of socialist society."

Lenin, Ibid, Vol.26 page 106.

### HEY PRESTO!

This passage contains some amazing statements. The banks have become nine-tenths of the socialist apparatus. All we need to do is unify them, make this single bank bigger, and "Hey Presto", you now have your basic socialist apparatus.

Quantity is to be transformed into quality. In other words, as the bank gets bigger and more powerful it changes from an instrument of oppression into one of liberation. We are further told that the bank will be made "even more democratic". Not "made democratic" as we might expect but made more so. This means that the banks, as they exist under capitalism, are in some way democratic. No doubt

this is something that workers in Bank of Ireland and AIB have been unaware of.

For Lenin it was not only the banks which could be transformed into a means for salvation.

"Socialism is merely the next step forward from state capitalist monopoly. Or, in other words, socialism is merely state capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people and has to that extent ceased to be capitalist monopoly"

Lenin, Ibid, Vol. 25 page 358.

"State capitalism is a complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism there are no immediate rungs".

Lenin, Ibid, Vol. 24 page 259.

## BUILDING CAPITALISM

This too is important. History is compared to a ladder that has to be climbed. Each step is a preparation for the next one. After state capitalism there was only one way forward - socialism. But it was equally true that until capitalism had created the necessary framework, socialism was impossible. Lenin and the Bolshevik leadership saw their task as the building of a state capitalist apparatus.

"...state capitalism would be a step forward as compared with the present state of affairs in our Soviet Republic. If in approximately six months time state capitalism became established in our Republic, this would be a great success and a sure guarantee that within a year socialism will have

gained a permanently firm hold and will become invincible in our country"

Lenin, Ibid, Vol. 27 page 294.

"While the revolution in Germany is still slow in "coming forth", our task is to study the state capitalism of the Germans, to spare no effort in copying it and not shrink from adopting dictatorial methods to hasten the copying of it"

Lenin, Ibid, Vol. 27 page 340.

#### WHAT DIFFERENCE?

The sole difference between state capitalism under the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' and the capitalism of other countries is that a different class would be in control of the state, according to Lenin's theory. But what, we are entitled to ask, is the difference between the two states if the working class does not control the Soviet state, becomes in fact controlled by it, and dictated to by it?

Anarchists have always held that the state, in the real sense of the word, is the means by which a minority justifies and enforces its control over the majority.

Lenin underlined this point when in March 1918 he told the Bolshevik Party that they must

"...stand at the head of the exhausted people who are wearily seeking a way out and lead them along the true path of labour discipline, along the task of co-ordinating the task of arguing at mass meetings about the conditions of work with the task of unquestioningly obeying the will of the Soviet leader, of the dictator during the work".

Lenin, Ibid, Vol. 27 page 270.



## NO TIME FOR SOCIALISM!

Lenin could not accept that working class people were more than capable of running their own lives. He continually sought justifications for the dictatorship of his party.

In June 1918 he informed the trade unions that

"there are many...who are not enlightened socialists and cannot be such because they have to slave in the factories and they have neither the time nor the opportunity to become socialists"

Lenin, Ibid, Vol. 27 page 466.

The month previously he had written

"Now power has been siezed, retained and consolidated in the hands of a single party, the party of the proletariat...".

Lenin, Ibid, Vol. 27 page 346.

## WHOSE PARTY?

One could be forgiven for thinking that the party which had siezed power was not a party of the proletariat when it so clearly distrusted them, dissolved their workplace councils, suppressed the rising of the Kronstadt workers in 1921, when it gradually strangled criticism from within its own ranks, and when its own leader flatly instructed the workers in October 1921:

"Get down to business all of you! You will have capitalists beside you, including foreign capitalists, concessionaries and leaseholders. They will squeeze profits out of you amounting to hundreds per cent; they will enrich

themselves, operating alongside of you. Let them, Meanwhile you will learn from them the business of running an economy, and only when you do that will you be able to build up a communist republic."

Lenin, Ibid, Vol. 33 page 72.

Lenin knew too much about socialism to simply drop all talk of workers eventually running the economy. As he once said, in a lucid moment: "The liberation of the workers can be achieved only by the workers' own efforts". Lenin, Ibid, Vol. 27 page 491. He was too little of one to actually allow them to do so.

### **JOE KING**

From Workers Solidarity No31, 1991

## HOW LENIN LED TO STALIN

### **WORKERS SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT**

FOR THE LENINIST far left the collapse of the USSR has thrown up more questions than it answered. If the Soviet Union really was a 'workers state' why were the workers unwilling to defend it? Why did they in fact welcome the changes?

What happened to Trotskys "political revolution or bloody counter revolution"? Those Leninist organisations which no longer see the Soviet Union as a workers state do not escape the contradictions either. If Stalin was the source of the problem why do so many Russian workers blame Lenin and the other Bolshevik leaders too.

The mythology of "Lenin, creator and sustainer of the Russian revolution" is now dying. With it will go all the Leninist groups for as the Soviet archives are increasingly opened it will become increasingly difficult to defend Lenin's legacy. The Left in the west has dodged and falsified the Lenin debate for 60 years now. Now however there is a proliferation of articles and meetings by the various Trotskyist groups trying to convince workers that Lenin did not lead to Stalin. Unfortunately much of this debate is still based on the slander and falsifications of history that has been symptomatic of Bolshevism since 1918. The key questions of what comprises Stalinism and when did "Stalinism" first come into practice are dodged in favour of rhetoric and historical falsehood.

Stalinism is defined by many features and indeed some of these are more difficult than others to lay at the feet of Lenin. The guiding points of Stalin's foreign policy for

instance was the idea of peaceful co-existence with the West while building socialism in the USSR ("socialism in one country"). Lenin is often presented as the opposite extreme, being willing to risk all in the cause of international revolution. This story like many others however is not all it seems. Other points that many would consider characteristic of Stalinism include, the creation of a one party state, no control by the working class of the economy, the dictatorial rule of individuals over the mass of society, the brutal crushing of all workers' action and the use of slander and historical distortion against other left groups.

## SOCIALISM IN ONE COUNTRY

The treaty of Brest-Livtosk of 1918, which pulled Russia out of World War I, also surrendered a very large amount of the Ukraine to the Austro-Hungarians. Obviously, there was no potential of continuing a conventional war (especially as the Bolsheviki had used the slogan "peace, bread, land" to win mass support). Yet, the presence of the Makhnovist movement in the Ukraine, clearly demonstrated a vast revolutionary potential among the Ukrainian peasants and workers. No attempt was made to supply or sustain those forces which did seek to fight a revolutionary war against the Austro-Hungarians. They were sacrificed in order to gain a respite to build "socialism" in Russia.

The second point worth considering about Lenin's internationalism is his insistence from 1918 onwards, that the task was to build "state capitalism, as "If we introduced state capitalism in approximately 6 months' time we would achieve a great success..".[1] He was also to say "Socialism is nothing but state capitalist monopoly made to benefit the

whole people". [2] This calls into question Lenin's concept of socialism.

## ONE PARTY STATE

Another key feature many would associate with Stalinism was the creation of a one party state, and the silencing of all opposition currents within the party. Many Trotskyists will still try to tell you that the Bolsheviks encouraged workers to take up and debate the points of the day, both inside and outside the party. The reality is very different for the Bolsheviks rapidly clamped down on the revolutionary forces outside the party, and then on those inside that failed to toe the line .

In April 1918 the Bolshevik secret police (The Cheka) raided 26 Anarchist centres in Moscow. 40 Anarchists were killed or injured and over 500 imprisoned [3]. In May the leading Anarchist publications were closed down [4]. Both of these events occurred before the excuse of the outbreak of the Civil War could be used as a 'justification'. These raids occurred because the Bolsheviks were beginning to lose the arguments about the running of Russian industry.

In 1918 also a faction of the Bolshevik party critical of the party's introduction of 'Talyorism' (the use of piece work and time & motion studies to measure the output of each worker, essentially the science of sweat extraction) around the journal Kommunist were forced out of Leningrad when the majority of the Leningrad party conference supported Lenin's demand "that the adherents of Kommunist cease their separate organisational existence". [5]

The paper was last published in May, silenced "Not by discussion, persuasion or compromise, but by a high pressure campaign in the Party organisations, backed by a barrage of violent invective in the party press...". [6] So much for encouraging debate!!

A further example of the Bolsheviks 'encouraging debate' was seen in their treatment of the Makhnovist in the Ukraine. This partisan army which fought against both the Ukrainian nationalists and the White generals at one time liberated over 7 million people. It was led by the anarchist Nestor Makhno and anarchism played the major part in the ideology of the movement. The liberated zone was run by a democratic soviet of workers and peasants and many collectives were set up.

### ECHOS OF SPAIN

The Makhnovists entered into treaties with the Bolsheviks three times in order to maintain a stronger united front against the Whites and nationalists. Despite this they were betrayed by the Bolsheviks three times, and the third time they were destroyed after the Bolsheviks arrested and executed all the delegates sent to a joint military council. This was under the instructions of Trotsky! Daniel Guerin's description of Trotsky's dealings with the Makhnovists is instructive "He refused to give arms to Makhno's partisans, failing in his duty of assisting them, and subsequently accused them of betrayal and of allowing themselves to be beaten by white troops. The same procedure was followed 18 years later by the Spanish Stalinists against the anarchist brigades" [7]

The final lid was put on political life outside or inside the party in 1921. The 1921 party congress banned all factions in the communist party itself. Trotsky made a speech denouncing one such faction, the Workers Opposition as having "placed the workers right to elect representatives above the party. As if the party were not entitled to assert its dictatorship even if that dictatorship temporarily clashed with the passing moods of the workers democracy". [8]

Shortly afterwards the Kronstadt rising was used as an excuse to exile, imprison and execute the last of the anarchists. Long before Lenins death the political legacy now blamed on Stalin had been completed. Dissent had been silenced inside and outside the party. The one party state existed as of 1921. Stalin may have been the first to execute party members on a large scale but with the execution of those revolutionaries outside the party and the silencing of dissidents within it from 1918 the logic for these purges was clearly in place.

#### THE WORKING CLASS UNDER LENIN

Another key area is the position of the working class in the Stalinist society. No Trotskyist would disagree that under Stalin workers had no say in the running of their workplaces and suffered atrocious conditions under threat of the state's iron fist. Yet again these conditions came in under Lenin and not Stalin. Immediately after the revolution the Russian workers had attempted to federate the factory committees in order to maximise the distribution of resources. This was blocked, with Bolshevik 'guidance', by the trade unions.

By early 1918 the basis of the limited workers control offered by the Bolsheviks (in reality little more than accounting) became clear when all decisions had to be approved by a higher body of which no more than 50% could be workers. Daniel Guerin describes the Bolshevik control of the elections in the factories "elections to factory committees continued to take place , but a member of the Communist cell read out a list of candidates drawn up in advance and voting was by show of hands in the presence of armed 'Communist' guards. Anyone who declared his opposition to the proposed candidates became subject to wage cuts, etc." [9]

On March 26th 1918 workers control was abolished on the railways in a decree full of ominous phrases stressing "iron labour discipline" and individual management. At least, say the Trotskyists, the railways ran on time. In April Lenin published an article in *Izvestiya* which included the introduction of a card system for measuring each workers productivity. He said "..we must organise in Russia the study and teaching of the Talyor system". "Unquestioning submission to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of the labour process...the revolution demands, in the interests of socialism, that the masses unquestioningly obey the single will of the leaders of the labour process" [10] Lenin declared in 1918. This came before the civil war broke out and makes nonsense of the claims that the Bolsheviks were trying to maximise workers control until the civil war prevented them from doing so.

With the outbreak of the Civil War things became much worse. In late May it was decreed that no more than 1/3 of the management personnel of industrial enterprises should be elected.<sup>11</sup> A few "highlights" of the following years are worth pointing out. At the ninth party congress in April of



1920 Trotsky made his infamous comments on the militarization of labour "the working class...must be thrown here and there, appointed, commanded just like soldiers. Deserters from labour ought to be formed into punitive battalions or put into concentration camps". [12] The congress itself declared "no trade union group should directly intervene in industrial management". [13]

## ONE MAN MANAGEMENT

At the trade union congress that April, Lenin was to boast how in 1918 he had "pointed out the necessity of recognising the dictatorial authority of single individuals for the purpose of carrying out the soviet idea". [14] Trotsky declared that "labour..obligatory for the whole country, compulsory for every worker is the basis of socialism"[15] and that the militarisation of labour was no emergency measure[16]. In War Communism and Terrorism published by Trotsky that year he said "The unions should discipline the workers and teach them to place the interests of production above their own needs and demands". It is impossible to distinguish between these policies and the labour policies of Stalin.

## WORKERS REVOLTS

Perhaps the most telling condemnation of the Stalinist regimes came from their crushing of workers' revolts, both the well known ones of East Berlin 1953, Hungary 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 and scores of smaller, less known risings. The first such major revolt was to happen at the height of Lenin due to large scale intimidan 1921 at Kronstadt, a naval base and town near Petrograd. The revolt

essentially occurred when Kronstadt attempted to democratically elect a Soviet and issued a set of proclamations calling for a return to democratic soviets and freedom of press and speech for left socialist parties".[17]

This won the support of not only the mass of workers and sailors at the base but of the rank and file of the Bolshevik party there as well. Lenins response was brutal. The base was stormed and many of the rebels who failed to escape were executed. Kronstadt had been the driving force for the revolution in 1917 and in 1921 the revolution died with it.

There are other commonly accepted characteristics of Stalinism. One more that is worth looking at is the way Stalinist organisations have used slander as a weapon against other left groups. Another is the way that Stalin re-wrote history. Yet again this is something which was a deep strain within Leninism. Mharko for example went from being hailed by the Bolshevik newspapers as the "Nemesis of the whites" [18] to being described as a Kulak and a bandit .

## SLANDERS

Modern day Trotskyists are happy to repeat this sort of slander along with describing Mharko as an anti-Semite. Yet the Jewish historian M. Tchernikover says "It is undeniable that, of all the armies, including the Red Army, the Makhnovists behaved best with regard to the civilian population in general and the Jewish population in particular."[19]

The leadership of the Makhnovists contained Jews and for those who wished to organise in this manner there were

specific Jewish detachments. The part the Makhnovists played in defeating the whites has been written out of history by every Trotskyist historian, some other historians however consider they played a far more decisive role than the Red Army in defeating Wrangel [20].

Kronstadt provides another example of how Lenin and Trotsky used slander against their political opponents. Both attempted to paint the revolt as being organised and lead by the whites. Pravda on March 3rd, 1921 described it as "A new White plot....expected and undoubtedly prepared by the French counter-revolution". Lenin in his report to the 10th Party Congress on March 8th said "White generals, you all know it, played a great part in this. This is fully proved". [21].

Yet even Isaac Deutscher, Trotskys biographer said in the Prophet armed "The Bolsheviks denounced the men of Kronstadt as counter-revolutionary mutineers, led by a White general. The denunciation appears to have been groundless"[22].

## RE-WRITING HISTORY

Some modern day Trotskyists repeat such slander others like Brian Pearce (historian of the Socialist Labour League on in Britain) try to deny it ever occurred "No pretence was made that the Kronstadt mutineers were White Guards"[23]In actual fact the only czarist general in the fort had been put there as commander by Trotsky some months earlier! Lets leave the last words on this to the workers of Kronstadt "Comrades, don't allow yourself to be misled. In Kronstadt, power is in the hands of the sailors, the red soldiers and of the revolutionary workers" [24]

There is irony in the fact that these tactics of slander and re-writing history as perfected by the Bolsheviks under Lenin were later to be used with such effect against the Trotskyists. Trotsky and his followers were to be denounced as "Fascists" and agents of international imperialism. They were to be written and air-brushed out of the history of the revolution. Yet to-day his followers, the last surviving Leninists use the same tactics against their political opponents.

The intention of this article is to provoke a much needed debate on the Irish left about the nature of Leninism and where the Russian revolution went bad. The collapse of the hastern European contextmakes it all the more urgent that this debate goes beyond trotting out the same old lies. If Leninism lies at the heart of Stalinism then those organisations that follow Lenin's teaching stand to make the same mistakes again. Anybody in a Leninist organisation who does not take this debate seriously is every bit as blind and misled as all those communist party members who thought the Soviet Union was a socialist country until the day it collapsed.

#### ON QUOTES AND MISQUOTES

The problem when writing an article covering this period of history is where you select your quotations from. Both Lenin and Trotsky changed their positions many times in this period. Many Leninists for example try to show Lenin's opposition to Stalinism by quoting from State and Revolution (1917). This is little more then deception as Lenin made no attempt to put the program outlined in this

pamphlet into practise. In any case it still contains his curious conception of Workers control.

I have only used quotes from the October revolution to 1921 and in every case these quotes are either statements of policy, or what should be policy at the time. As socialists are aware governments in opposition may well say "Health cuts hurt the old, the sick and the handicapped". It is however in power that you see their real programme exposed.

From Workers Solidarity No33, 1991

## LOOKING BACK AT RED OCTOBER

**PETER SULLIVAN**  
**WORKERS SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT**

The above article is part of a series being done by Workers Solidarity that will examine and analyse some of the many lessons that can be learned from the Russian Revolution. The next article, Beware of Bolsheviks ("[http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/ws98/ws53\\_bolshevik.html](http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/ws98/ws53_bolshevik.html)") will examine the detrimental effect that Lenin and the Bolsheviks had on the revolution that Russian workers made.

The Russian Revolution began 80 years ago this autumn. Looking back now it would be easy to concentrate on the eventual outcome and the defeat of the Revolution. But to concentrate on this alone would be a mistake. The Russian Revolution was an incredible breakthrough in ways that are often not appreciated. A seemingly all-powerful and repressive state that most Russians saw as 'permanent and unchangeable' fell away in a few short months.

Massive demonstrations by workers (the first by women workers on International Women's Day in 1917) gave many Russians a view of what their own power and strength would be if they joined together. As a number of commentators have noted since, these early examples of collective power and success broke an important barrier. One mainstream historian noted, "The new found freedoms of 1917 caused a tremendous upsurge in ordinary people's capacity to organise themselves". As early successes were built upon, "a multiplicity of

organisations" were created from below. The sense of collective power grew and grew. Alongside this people's horizons and aspirations also expanded rapidly.

For one of the first times in history, a grassroots democracy emerged that transformed the workplace and abolished the typical lot of all workers everywhere: having to obey orders, having to accept an authoritarian workplace. Workers and peasants saw that democracy should not be limited to just a parliament and politicians. Instead they saw themselves and their own areas and places of work as the primary locations of democracy. This was where they started the revolution and this was a first in world history - an enormous achievement by ordinary people who had hitherto been confined to the most passive and backward of roles.

#### A GLIMPSE OF THE POSSIBLE

Prior to the Russian Revolution, there had been some examples of workers taking over their places of work and their own communities. In the Paris Commune (1871) there had been some early attempts at this - however the Commune only lasted for a short period of time and offered only 'a glimpse' of the real potential. Similarly with the 1905 Revolution in Russia. Other than this there had been a number of 'Utopian' efforts - though these remained strictly within the confines of a capitalist world - that is they never called into question the entire running of the economy.

The Russian Revolution was a major break with all of this. Power and 'the right to manage' was taken by workers into their own hands at their own places of

work. The entire system of exploitation (what is known still as 'working for a wage') began to collapse - to be replaced with a new egalitarian system in which workers played a key role.

The revolutionary movement that emerged in Russia throughout 1917 surprised many observers - not least those in Russian society who always maintain 'that they know best'. Imagine the surprise of the boss at the Brenner factory in Petrograd (now St Petersburg) in June of 1917 when the workers wrote in reply to an attempt at a lockout: 'In view of the management's refusal to go on with production, the workers' committee has decided in general assembly to fulfil the orders and to carry on working.' Instead of complying and going meekly back to their place, the workers locked out the management and began running the establishment themselves!

If you are wondering if this was an aberration, the short answer is no. Factory committees of workers sprang up throughout Russia over the months between February and December of 1917. Within a very short period factories, trams and trains, schools and food distribution were being run by workers. On the land, peasants quickly took over and did what they had always dreamed of doing: planting the land without having to be at the beck and call of any overseer. As one peasant resolution in the region of Samara province put it: 'The land must belong to those who work it with their hands, to those whose sweat flows.'

Many people today think that revolution is an impossible idea. But looking back at the beginning of the Russian Revolution, it is important to remember that at times a revolution can appear as a very distant aim, even though



it may only be a decade or two away. A casual observer in 1900 in Russia would have said 'I don't think a revolution will ever happen here - not among this lot'. Yet 17 years later on, what would she or he have thought?

#### IF WE KNEW OUR POWER

Ireland today is also an example of how limited the horizons appears to be. Workers are locked into the Partnership 2000 deal that offers minuscule pay increases over the next three years - this despite the huge growth in bosses' profits. Yet what is the reality? Is that all there is? When we are prevented from seeing our collective strength, even the smallest improvements seem impossible or hopeless. As workers, we are often divided by the most minor of things, into different sections in our unions, into different unions, into different grades, into different types (public sector versus private sector, for example).

Division, in fact, is one of the more obvious features in our class today. Not surprisingly, this is done for a good reason. It suits all the vested interests (and they are many) that we think of our divisions first and everything else second. To prevent us from seeing our own power as a collective body, and to prevent us having expectations larger and more radical than Partnership 2000 - this is a major achievement for those who benefit from today's capitalist system.

If we look back at the Russian Revolution from this distance of 80 years then one of the more important lessons that we could learn from it is how powerful we

are when we act as a collective body. Divisions often appear large and insurmountable when we are unaware of or have forgotten our collective power. But when collective strength re-emerges (as it will in time) our divisions won't quite disappear (do they ever?) but they will become insignificant against the wider possibilities that will open out.

## BEWARE THE BOLSHEVIKS

**DAMIAN LAWLOR**

This article is from Workers Solidarity No 53  
("http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/ws98.html") published in January 1998,  
there is also a page of WSM articles on the Russian Revolution  
(http://flag.blackened.net/revolt/russia\_wsm.html)

IN 1922, after seeing the product of the Russian revolution first hand, the anarchist Emma Goldman described how "Soviet Russia had become the modern socialist Lourdes". Eighty years after the revolution in Russia a reflection on that period has more than just historical value. Many left wing organisations still hold up this era as the model for future revolution. In order to challenge this Bolshevik conception of organisation and revolution we look at what the consequences of this model were.

The Bolsheviks organised as a vanguard party, which intended to lead the revolution. This structure led to particular outcomes and a look at the 'hidden' history of the Russian Revolution illustrates this. Lenin, in his book 'State and Revolution', talks of a society where every cook shall govern.

But in reality the Party, in its capacity of leader of the revolution, was governing. By November 9th 1917 a soviet (committee of elected workers' delegates) in the Peoples Commissariat of Posts & Telegraphs had already been abolished by decree. Even earlier than this, the revolution having barely liberated the workers from virtual slavery, Bolshevik leaders were telling workers

that "the best way to support Soviet Government is to carry on with one's job".

Lenin, in March 1918, wrote (Collected Works, Vol. 27 page 270) that the Party relates to workers by leading "them along the true path of labour discipline, along the task of coordinating the task of arguing at mass meetings about the conditions of work with the task of unquestioningly obeying the will of the Soviet leader, of the dictator during the work". So much for every cook governing.

These are not just isolated incidents. The Party soon began to institutionalise its dominance, for instance factory committees, instead of being allowed to form federations across the industries, had to report to undemocratic bodies which were hand picked by the Party. It is in this context that Daniel Guerin argued that "In fact the power of the soviets only lasted a few months, from October 1917 to the spring of 1918."

How did the Bolsheviks go about 'securing' the revolution? Trotsky, as leader of the Red Army, reintroduced regular army discipline, not only including executions for desertion but also all the petty regulations like saluting that gave officers special positions. He abolished election of officers, writing "the elective basis is politically pointless and technically inexpedient and has already been set aside by decree".

The White Terror was responded to with collective punishments, categorical punishments, torture, hostage taking and random punishments. These were not just directed at known 'Whites' but also at their friends and families. On 3rd September 1918, the Bolshevik

newspaper 'Ivestia' announced that over 500 hostages had been shot by the Petrograd Cheka, not because they had committed a crime but because they were unlucky enough to come from the wrong background.

Some will argue that this terror was legitimised by the White Terror. But by April of 1918 the terror was to be used against political groups that supported the revolution but opposed Bolshevik rule. Over two days in April 1918, 40 anarchists were killed or wounded and around 500 put in prison in a series of attacks in Moscow and Petrograd.

All the major anarchist publications were banned in May 1918. This despite the fact that anarchists had fought for the revolution in October, four anarchists being on the Military Revolutionary Committee which co-ordinated the rising. Over the next four years, hundreds then thousands of anarchists were to be arrested, jailed, tortured, exiled and executed. Other pro-revolution left parties suffered a similar fate and by 1919 so did workers who acted independently against the regime.

Bolshevik modes of organisation have particular outcomes, the centralisation of power. This sort of organisation means that 'Stalin didn't fall from the moon' but was the inheritor of this undemocratic organisation. This is in opposition to 'Socialism from Below' and the motto of the First International, "the emancipation of the toilers must be the work of the toilers themselves" and not the work of some 'vanguard' party.

# **STATE CAPITALISM IN RUSSIA**

## **A WORKERS SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT POSITION PAPER**

While there have been many changes in Eastern Europe since 1988, it is important to state that these countries were not in any way socialist and to explain why.

1. Since the early 1920's anarchists have recognised that the Russian economy is capitalist because it maintains the separation of producers from their means of production and undervalues their labour to extract surplus value for a ruling class as in all Capitalist countries. It is also subject to the same rigid law of constant accumulation .

2. In the case of Russia all property/means of production belongs to the Russian State so all surplus value accrues to it.

3. Absence of internal markets in the USSR and other Stalinist countries does not mean that the Capitalist mode of production is not in force. Surplus value is incorporated into goods at the point of production under Capitalism. In the West this surplus value is realised as money profits by selling them. But the surplus labour is incorporated into goods whether or not they are sold. This can be used directly providing use values for the Capitalist such as weapons or extra plant and machinery. This is the way state Capitalism works. Goods are also sold on the international market and the money is shared out among the bureaucracy as bribes, wages and awards. But internally surplus value is realised directly as use values such as plant and weapons which

- i) keeps the system ticking over and
- ii) maintains the bureaucracy in it's privileged class position.

4. In any Capitalist system profit is extracted at the point of production by undervaluing labour power. Whether or not this profit is realised as cash money at the market is not of primary importance. A system which feeds most of it's surplus value back into itself as means of production is possible in theory. Indeed all Capitalist systems tend towards this with more and more profit going into plant and machinery and less and less labour from which to extract a profit. Western style Capitalism is now in this very degenerate phase with larger and larger corporations and more and more investment in plant, machinery and technology.

5. The Soviet Union is a nightmare form of Capitalism where weapons systems and heavy machinery proliferate but basic consumer needs cannot be met.

6. Absence of private property in the Soviet Union is often put forward as evidence that Stalinist countries are not Capitalist but some new "Post-Capitalist " property form. However property forms (who owns what in law) can be a convenient legal fiction concealing the essential relations of production. The so called Asiatic Mode of Production. This was a description of the system pertaining in China and many parts of the Far East up to late feudal times. In theory property was collective but in practice it was held "for the people" by a small Oligarchy and passed from father to son. So all rents and profits (beyond what was needed to keep body and soul together) passed to them. State Capitalism employs a similar ruse to conceal it's exploitative nature.

7. Despite the protestations of Stalinists and Trotskyists of various hues there has always been unemployment in the Soviet Union especially high in oppressed outlying regions such as Armenia and Azerbaijan. This unemployment has been and is concealed as unpaid slave labour (labour camps), low paid work and seasonal and migratory work in the outlying areas. There is also homelessness, poverty and all the other nice Capitalist trimmings.

How did Russia become State Capitalist? 8. Essentially after the October (1917) revolution the organised working class had expropriated much of the means of production and most land was seized by the peasants. However before they could consolidate and expand these gains they lost power to a rising bureaucratic class.

9. It is vital for us to realise that this was not an inevitable or accidental development. The transfer of power from one class to another requires a careful, premeditated plan on behalf of those win it and confusion, division and weakness among the class which loses it. The centralisation of all Finance, land and means of production was proposed by Marx as an initial step towards socialism. Marx's ambiguous views on organisation were transformed by the Bolsheviks into a rigorous attack on workers self-management. Workers control was viewed simply as a step on the road to nationalisation, with socialism placed very far down the road. Such a philosophy led directly to State Capitalism (as predicted by Bakunin in the first International).

10. By 1921 the emerging bureaucratic class (Bolsheviks and the remains of the Tsarist middle class) had wrested



power from the workers. This process was completed in essence by 1918 and accelerated by "war communism" during the civil war and Trotsky's "Militarisation of labour" just after. The civil war decimated the workers and left them powerless to resist and hang on to the gains of the revolution.

11. The process was finalised by Stalin though the actual transfer of power had been completed and justified by Trotsky, Lenin and Co. The only small difference was that the "New Bolsheviks" recruited after 1917 were subjectively as well as objectively State Capitalists.

Recent developments in Russia and Eastern Europe.

12. Russia and Eastern Europe have not been without workers opposition to the dictatorship of State Capitalism. 1953 and 1956 saw uprisings in East Germany and Hungary brutally crushed. In 1968 an attempt to liberalise the Czech economy by Dubcek and other "reform Communists" snowballed into a popular revolt which had to be put down by Soviet tanks. In Poland there were riots in 1970 and 1976 and at the end of 1980 a mass strike movement spread out of the Gdansk shipyard. The Solidarnosc movement was a mass trade union containing many left currents for workers' self-management. However the leadership was made up of reformists like Kuron and Walesa. These made common ground with the Catholic church and reform minded Communists. Demands for workers' self-management were channelled into power-sharing in a liberal Capitalist economy. Reformist and conservative forces dominated the union from birth despite notable rank file action such as the takeover and management of the entire city of Lodz by the local Solidarity in Autumn

1981. The implementation of martial law in December 1981 was aimed almost exclusively at destroying rank and file organisation in the union. The leadership served brief terms under house arrest and in prison while rank and file resistance in mines and factories throughout Poland was crushed. It was then safe to release the Union "leaders" to Co-supervise the rush to the market with reform minded communists. Henri Simon (Author of Poland 1980-1982) sums up in this way; "within a national framework, Capital tries to make use of the Class struggle as a lever to dislodge the backward forces in it's midst and replace them with more trusty instruments of domination."

13. The early years of struggle in Poland did find an echo in other parts of Eastern Europe. In Romania an embryonic free trade union; the SLMOR took government officials hostage and in Russia the Free Inter-professional Association of Workers (SMOT) was formed.

14. Gorbachev inherited (sic!) a Russian economy in severe crisis. For the Party to survive and maintain control he realised some economic liberalisation was necessary. The threat of mass revolt and economic bankruptcy in the near future was hanging over their heads.

15. Initially his aim was probably to bring about some form of limited internal market in consumer goods while maintaining bureaucratic planing and power in arms and heavy industry. However this form of hybrid capitalism proved impossible and events have moved on rapidly. Now it is Gorbachev who calls for a rapid move to the

market and only arch "conservatives" like Ligachov share Gorbachev's 1988 position.

16. As in Czechoslovakia initial economic reforms found a massive popular echo. To achieve support for limited Perestroika or restructuring Gorby had to allow a huge amount of Glasnost.

17. The opening up of the Soviet Union prompted a popular response in Eastern Europe with Gorbachev unwilling or, indeed, unable to intervene. In Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland and Romania mass demonstrations and, in the latter case, an armed revolution swept the ideology of Stalinism into the dustbin of history (though in Romania there hasn't even been major political change with many of Ceaucescu's old buddies still to be found in the "National Salvation Front"). In Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Hungary the change over to a multi-party system was brought about gradually by reform communists thus avoiding mass demonstrations.

18. In these countries there has been a rush to embrace the joys of the free market (Far from the intentions of many of the original "pro-democracy" demonstrators). However though many concerns have been closed or sold to foreign investors others are now "owned" rather than "managed" by there former "directors"!

19. Neither of the two ridiculous Trotskyist notions that

1) this was the vital injection of workers democracy that would transform these countries into socialist paradises or

2) that workers would actively defend the so called "post Capitalist" property forms has been borne out in fact.

20. However there has been strikes and other working class action in defence of some features in particular State Capitalist countries such as greater access to abortion (East Germany), cheaper transport etc. We absolutely support workers in defence of jobs and better facilities if these exist. This in no way commits us to defending State Capitalism anymore than, for instance, we would defend Western Capitalism though it might give greater freedom of speech or movement to workers. We support workers' defence of jobs and conditions as well as groups calling for greater democracy, regional autonomy and individual freedom.

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